

ADVOCARE TEXAS BOWL PREVIEW

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**On the Cover:** Trevor Knight says goodbye to the 12th Man before the LSU game. Photo by Rob Havens '88.



# Howdy Ags!

Another year is coming to an end and the Aggie football team is preparing for the Advocare Texas Bowl. With the coaching staff assembling a top 10 recruiting class, it is still very important that this team finishes the season with a win. The Ags will have their hands full with a Hall of Fame head coach and a former conference foe that knows how to run the ball and eat up the clock. I hope NRG Stadium will be rocking with Aggies and the team can feed off the crowd to finish the year off right and give us some momentum heading into next season. Enjoy more pre-bowl predictions in our bowl game preview later in this issue.

Also inside this issue, you will see that we got a chance to visit with Aggie punter Shane Tripucka. The talented specialist has an inspiring story and he shares with us all of the hard work and dedication it took for him to earn a starting role and a coveted scholarship. Our campus is full of walk-ons in every sport that work their tails off with the hope and dream of playing or earning a scholarship for athletics. Tripucka is a great example of how that hard work can pay off.

Both of our basketball teams are in full swing as they prepare for conference play and make a push for another trip to "The Big Dance." The men's team has lots of talent, but trying to replace Alex Caruso will be a challenge for Billy Kennedy as the team battles for another SEC Championship. Gary Blair lost three of his best players to graduation and his team is trying to develop chemistry with new players that are seeing big minutes for the first time.

Aggieland is experiencing it's first taste of cold weather and that means Aggie baseball is right around the corner. Inside this issue you can enjoy a story about how coach Rob Childress begins his team's journey to Omaha by coming together as a squad and helping the community at the same time.

I'd like to thank our corporate partners and subscribers that make this magazine possible. I want to express my gratitude to the coaches, athletes and everyone with Aggie Athletics for giving us inside access to show our readers what a special place Texas A&M is. Last, but not least, thank you to my staff who works hard to put together Aggieland Illustrated, you are the best!

Gig'em Ags!

*Rob '88*





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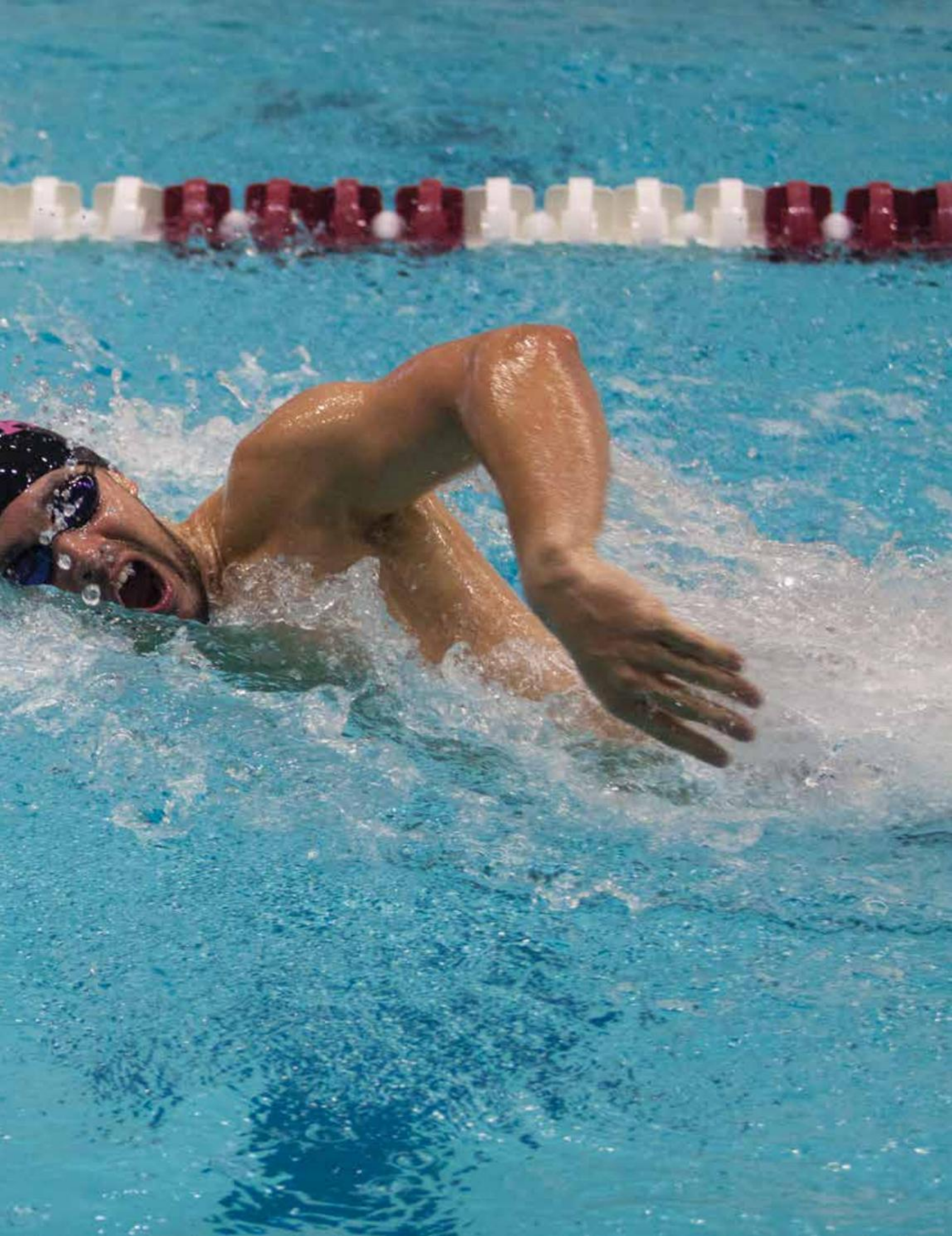
A close-up, low-angle shot of a swimmer in a pool. The swimmer's head and shoulders are visible on the right side, partially submerged. A large splash of water is visible around the swimmer's head. In the background, a lane divider with alternating red and white floats stretches across the frame. The water is a clear, bright blue.

snapshot

## blistering pace...

Aggie senior Jacob Gonzales swept the 50 free and the 100 free as the team defeated South Carolina in its home opener. The Aggies dominated the Gamecocks, winning 11 of 16 events. The team posted a 176-118 resounding victory. The Ags vaulted into the CSCAA Top 25 Poll, debuting at number 14.  
Photo by Rob Havens '88.













## gliding to the rim...

Admon Gilder takes it to the hole for two in early season action for men's hoops. The talented sophomore has played big minutes this season for Billy Kennedy. With the loss of Alex Caruso, Gilder has been called on to play multiple rolls in the Aggie offense. Whether that means running the point or scoring from the two, the Aggies know how important it is to have him on the floor.

Photo by Rob Havens '88.





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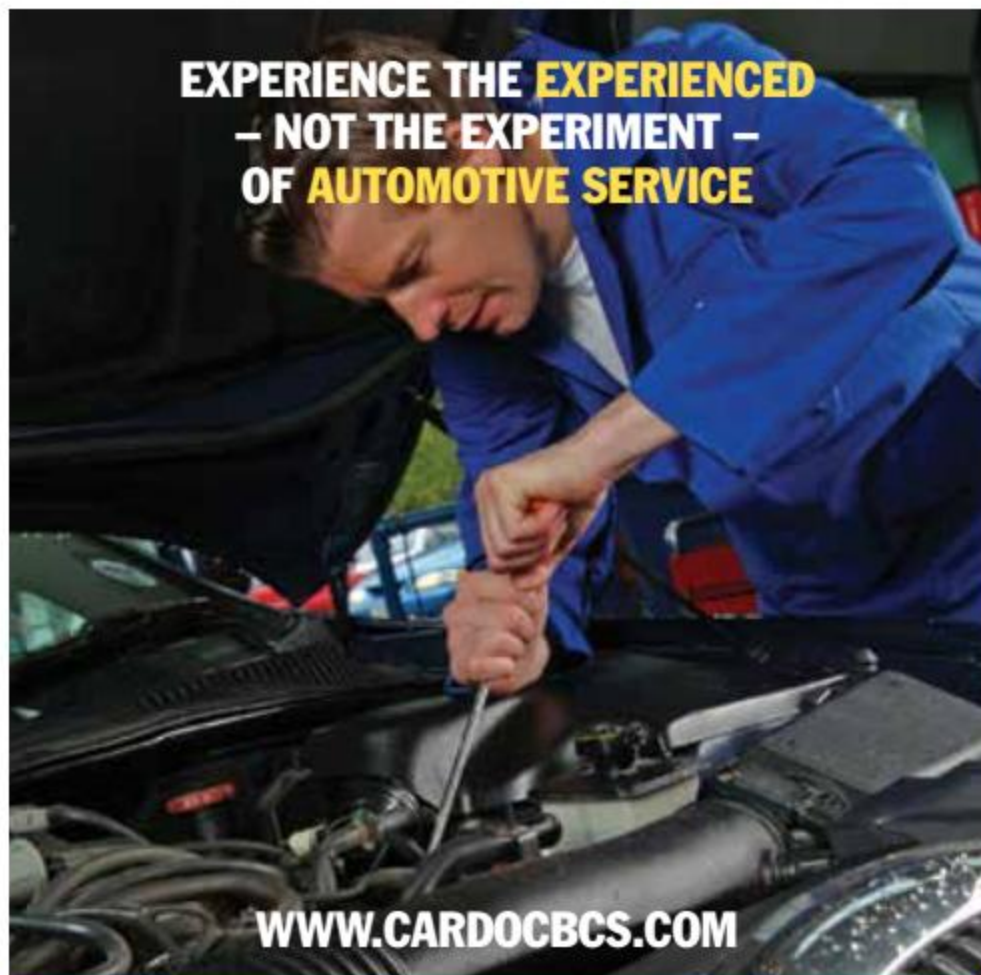
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**[baseball]** Aggie baseball wrapped up their fall practices with the annual Maroon & White Championship Series. The Farmers took the first two games, clinching the Omaha Cup and bragging rights over the Plowboys. Coach Childress and his staff also signed 13 new players for the 2018 season.



**[equestrian]** The Texas A&M equestrian team finished the fall as the No. 1 squad in the nation. The talented group finished the fall with wins over No. 8 South Carolina and No. 3 Georgia. The Ags recorded a 5-1 record (2-1 SEC) and held the top spot in the country for six consecutive weeks.

**[softball]** The softball team was busy this fall with seven home games, followed by a five game inner-squad series at the Aggie Softball Complex. The Ags went 6-0-1 in the fall outscoring their opponents 62-4 which included four shutouts. The White team won the Maroon and White Series 4-1. Coach Evans and her staff also signed seven new players who will join the team in the fall of 2017.



**[women's swimming & diving]** The Aggies wrapped up the fall portion of their season as the No. 7 ranked team in the country. The team went 4-1 in head to heads including a big win over No. 18 Florida. The team will face Auburn and LSU this spring before competing in the SEC Championships in Knoxville TN in February.



**[men's swimming & diving]** The men's swimming and diving team had a big win over South Carolina this fall. The Aggies started the meet strong by winning the 200-yard medley relay. They closed the meet by taking the 400 free relay and accumulating 176 points to beat the Gamecocks. They went 2-1 in head-to-head meets this fall and will return to action at home this spring when they host LSU on Saturday January 21, 2017. The SEC Championships begin February 14, 2017.





## scoreboard



**[soccer]** With three games left in the regular season the Aggie soccer team was at risk of missing both the SEC and NCAA tournaments. The squad showed the heart of a champion by winning their last three regular season games. They went on to defeat Alabama in the first round of the SEC tournament. The women earned their 22nd consecutive NCAA bid and defeated TCU in the first round. Unfortunately, they came up just short in a penalty kick shootout against USC in the next round. The Trojans went on to win the National Championship.



**[women's tennis]** According to women's tennis coach Mark Weaver the team has battled through plenty of injuries since early in the fall. But now, he says, "We are closing out the fall season healthy and playing very good as a group, so there really isn't much more that I could ask for at this point." The team opens the spring portion of their schedule on January 21st against SFA.



**[women's basketball]** After losing three of the teams best players to graduation last year, Gary Blair's team is working hard to put things together. Danni Williams continues to show why Blair recruited her to A&M. Through the first nine games she has lead the team in scoring with 18.8 ppg. Inside, Hillsman has become the Ags go-to player. The team is strong in scoring from three-point range and inside; if they can develop a mid-range threat then this team could be dangerous.



**[men's basketball]** The men's basketball has had a productive fall campaign. The addition of standout forward Robert Williams has given the Aggies depth inside. Tyler Davis was just named SEC Player of the Week after the Aggies won three games in six days. Trocha-Morelos, Hogg and Gilder are blossoming in their second season under Kennedy and JC Hampton is starting to step up as the leader at the point that the Aggies will need.



**[volleyball]** The Aggie volleyball team had another successful season this year. They won ten of their last eleven regular season matches finishing in a third place tie in the SEC. The team lost in the first round of the NCAA tournament ending the collegiate careers of Victoria Arenas, Jazzmin Babers, Emily Hardesty, Katelyn Labhart and Kaysie Shebeneck.



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BY ROB HAVENS '88

# BOWL PREVIEW

Texas A&M will be reunited with a former conference foe as the Aggies take on the Kansas St. Wildcats in the Advocate Texas Bowl on December 28th at 8 p.m. Just the name Texas A&M probably makes Wildcat fans, coaches and alumni cringe as they remember the Aggies' 1998 team upsetting #1 K State who was headed to the National Championship. Lead by a backup quarterback in Brannndon Stewart, the Aggies came from behind late in the Big 12 Championship Game to beat Kansas St. in double overtime and send the Cats to the Alamo Bowl. The highlight reel still plays every game as you hear Dave South making the call, "He got a touchdown, he got a touchdown, he got a touchdown!" The image of Sirr Parker taking a slant pass to go 32 yards, fighting through every tackle to score the winning touchdown, flashes through our heads.

In his first presser for this bowl, Coach Snyder reminisced about the Championship game. "I think back to the last time we played them, I believe it was '98, the championship game," Snyder said. "We lost that ball game to them – it was a hard loss. We had an opportunity to go to the National Championship had we won that one. They came back and beat us late in the ball game. That's a tribute to them. I've

always had a great deal of respect for their program."

The Aggies lost to the Wildcats the last time they played in 2011, a four overtime affair. So based on history, the two schools have always provided exciting and very competitive games, and the Advocate Texas Bowl should be no different. The Wildcats have won five of their last six games and even though they are the youngest team in the Bill Snyder era, they have grown up fast and are showing they know how to win.

The Aggies suffered through a difficult November with injuries burdening important positions including quarterback. They are hoping that a month between games will allow players to heal and prepare to finish the 2016 season with a much needed win.

The matchup features a K State team that likes to run the ball. In their last six games, they are averaging almost 300 yards on the ground. A signature of a Snyder team, the quarterback is a major part of the running game. Junior signal caller Jesse Ertz leads the running attack with almost 1,100 yards rushing this season. His offensive line is stacked with talent and they have gotten better as the season has progressed. The Wildcats only average 130 yards a game

through the air so it's imperative the Aggies figure out a way to stop the run.

On defense, Big 12 Defensive Player of the Year Jordan Willis leads the Wildcat team. The senior defensive end led the conference with 11.5 sacks. He had 48 tackles including 16.5 for a loss and forced three fumbles. Defensive tackle Will Geary and linebacker Elijah Lee were also first team Big 12 selections. The defense ranked 9th out of 10 teams in the Big 12 for net yards allowed.

Kansas State eats up the clock by running the ball and driving it down the field little by little. They stack the offensive line and try to run it down their opponent's throat. The Aggies will have to stop the run and force the Cats into passing downs. With their time consuming drives, the Aggies will have to take advantage of every possession.

The Aggies can score on the Cats but just like in previous games, this one could come down to the very end. Let's just hope we can add another exciting finish to our game day video package and leave the Cats hearing the echo of Dave South's call, "He got a touchdown, he got a touchdown, he got a touchdown!"





GAMES 7-12

# FOOTBALL REWIND



## [ GAME 7: A&M 14, **ALABAMA 33** ]



### ▲ PHOTOS OF THE GAME



vs.



Texas A&M started the second half of their season with a 6-0 record and a #6 ranking heading to Tuscaloosa to take on the #1 ranked Alabama Crimson Tide. The Tide's offense appeared to be unstoppable on their first two series as they carved up the Aggie defense up and down the field. But instead of a 14-0 lead, the defense had forced two field goal attempts and kept the Ags within striking distance. Alabama extended the lead to 13-0 before Texas A&M finally got the offense going late in the second quarter. The team ran and passed the ball for 80 yards in 1:42 and a touchdown by Josh Reynolds gave the Aggies new life. In the second half, the team again drove the length of the field and Trevor Knight found Christian Kirk for a 25-yard touchdown and the Ags had a 14-13 lead. Unfortunately penalties, turnovers and the nation's best team changed the game. Alabama scored 20 unanswered points and sent the Aggies home with their first loss of the season.



## [ GAME 8: NEW MEXICO ST 10, **A&M 52** ]



### ▲ PHOTOS OF THE GAME



vs.



Texas A&M rebounded from the loss to Alabama with a big win over the New Mexico St Aggies. Christian Kirk was the player of the game as the talented sophomore returned two punts for touchdowns. He added another score on a touchdown catch from Trevor Knight in the second quarter. Kirk became the first Aggie in program history to return two punts for touchdowns in the same game, giving him a total of four in his career. The Ags rolled up 515 yards of total offense in the contest and were able to rest most of their starters after increasing the lead in the third quarter. Jake Hubenak replaced Trevor Knight in the third, giving him some live game reps that would be critical as the Aggies continued their season. All five running backs saw action in the game and twelve receivers caught balls as Texas A&M rolled over the overmatched Aggies of New Mexico St.



# [ GAME 9: A&M 28, **MISSISSIPPI ST 35** ]



## ▲ PHOTOS OF THE GAME



vs.



On November 1<sup>st</sup>, the first College Football Playoff Poll came out and Texas A&M was selected by the committee as the fourth best team in the country. With three seemingly easy wins on the upcoming schedule, the Aggies were in prime position to take their place amongst the elite of college football. But a trip to Starkville changed all of that as the team came out flat and before we knew it they trailed 28-7. To make things worse, Trevor Knight suffered a shoulder injury in the second quarter and was unable to return into the game. The Aggies battled back and got within seven with less than two minutes left in the game, but Hubenak was intercepted with :14 remaining and the Aggies late run came up short. The loss dropped the Aggies out of contention for the CFP and any chance of going to the SEC Championship Game. The defense gave up 365 yards rushing in the contest and 209 yards in the air.



## [ GAME 10: **OLE MISS 29**, A&M 28 ]



### ▲ PHOTOS OF THE GAME



After a devastating loss to Mississippi St., Coach Sumlin was still imploring his team to keep fighting with a great bowl opportunity still within grasp. Trying to avoid another late season collapse, the team was inspired to go out and face the Ole Miss Rebels. The game became the battle of the backups as Ole Miss lost their starting quarterback Chad Kelly the previous week and the Aggies were without the services of Trevor Knight. The Aggies jumped on the Rebels 21-6 and looked in complete control of the game early on. Keith Ford scored two rushing touchdowns and Christian Kirk added another score on a catch from Jake Hubenak to give the team the lead at the break. But true freshman Shea Patterson, who was seeing his first action as a college player, lead his team to four fourth quarter scoring trips and Gary Wunderlich made a 39-yard field goal with 37 seconds left to defeat the Aggies in game ten.



## [ GAME 11: UTSA 10, **A&M 23** ]



### ▲ PHOTOS OF THE GAME



vs.



With the first feel of fall in the air, over a hundred thousand fans gathered in Kyle Field to watch The Fightin' Texas Aggies (7-3) take on the Road Runners (6-5). Unbeknownst to us, Jake Hubenak suffered an injury late against Ole Miss and didn't throw a pass all week. Within the first few minutes, the gutsy quarterback led the Aggies down the field and completed a 14-yard pass to Josh Reynolds for the first touchdown of the game giving the Ags momentum moving forward. On the defensive end, the Aggies dominated with a total of six sacks as a team. A healthy Myles Garrett lead the squad with four and a half sacks, helping hold the Roadrunners to only 252 yards. On the offensive side, Jake Hubenak threw for his season high of 248 yards. This combined with rushing attacks from Trayveon Williams and Keith Ford gave Texas A&M 431 total yards. The 23-10 victory over UTSA was just what the doctor ordered and gave the team a boost going into the Thanksgiving game.



# [ GAME 12: **LSU 54**, A&M 39 ]



## ▲ PHOTOS OF THE GAME



The final game of the regular season was a huge game for Texas A&M. The Aggies had not beaten the LSU Tigers since joining the SEC and with a win, the team still had an opportunity to go to the Sugar Bowl. For a second straight year, the Tigers were playing to save the job of their head coach. Ed Orgeron was rumored to be out and his team was fired up to keep him. LSU was missing a few key players including Leonard Fournette, one of the best running backs in the country. The Aggies rolled up 39 points on a defense that had given up a game high 21 only once this year. Making a comeback that closely resembled the one of Willis Reed, Trevor Knight returned from his shoulder injury to lead the team on Thanksgiving. Unfortunately, Derrius Guice could not be stopped and he ran up and down the field on the Aggie defense, which had no answer for the talented back. The Aggies finished the season 8-4 and saved another LSU head coaching job in the process.





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# TRIPUCKA

FROM PREFERRED WALK-ON TO STARTER PUNTER  
SHANE TRIPUCKA PROVES HARD WORK PAYS OFF

BY ROB HAVENS '88



One of the most important players on a Division I football team is the punter. I know, I know, when we were kids on the playground and you were picking teams you chose the kids with the best arm or the ones who could catch and you could care less who could punt. You just P for K anyway right? For those that don't remember the playground lingo, that's Pass for Kick. But in big time college football you have to have a great punter. As a coach, it's a position player you hope you never have to use but when you need them, they can make a huge difference in the game. Whether you require a long punt when you're backed up against your own end zone, or you need them to drop it as close to the goal line as possible, a punter can decide the game.

Texas A&M has become a little bit of a Punter U with two Aggies currently starting in the NFL in Shane Lechler and Drew Kaser. With only 32 teams in the League, that is saying quite a bit about the skill level required to earn one of those coveted jobs.

Entering this season there were question marks if there would be a drop off at the position after the graduation of Drew Kaser. Those questions were answered by redshirt Junior, Shane Tripucka. The talented punter was an Under Armour All-American out of Allen High School. He told us he didn't get a ton of offers out of high school but did receive a bunch of preferred walk on spots. To him, Texas A&M stood out. "I felt comfortable when I was being recruited to come here and it just stood out against all of the other schools... I love it here."

Unlike the scholarship football player who arrives on campus with school, books, housing and food taken care of, the preferred walk-on arrives with the hope and the dream to earn a starting job and a coveted scholarship. These players are some of the hardest workers in college sports. Waking up for a 5:15 a.m. workout, enduring conditioning drills that have players puking in trashcans, long practices, position meetings, and then on top of that, all

of the classes, tests and assignments as a regular student. All the while they are paying their own way.

Tripucka worked hard for three years before finally finding out right before the 2016 season that he was being rewarded a scholarship. When we asked him what it was like to finally get the news, "It was the greatest feeling ever," he said. "Because you invest in all that work for years and years, you get used to putting your head down and get after it everyday. Then when you finally get rewarded, it's a great feeling because your teammates are around you to congratulate you, they are proud of you, it's awesome."

Shane wasted no time putting all that hard work to good use as he started in all 12 games this year. He punted 66 times with an average of 43.2 yards per kick. Some of his most amazing stats don't show up on the punting average chart. Tripucka had an unheard of 27 punts inside the 20-yard line with zero touchbacks. He led the SEC in several categories including net punting average



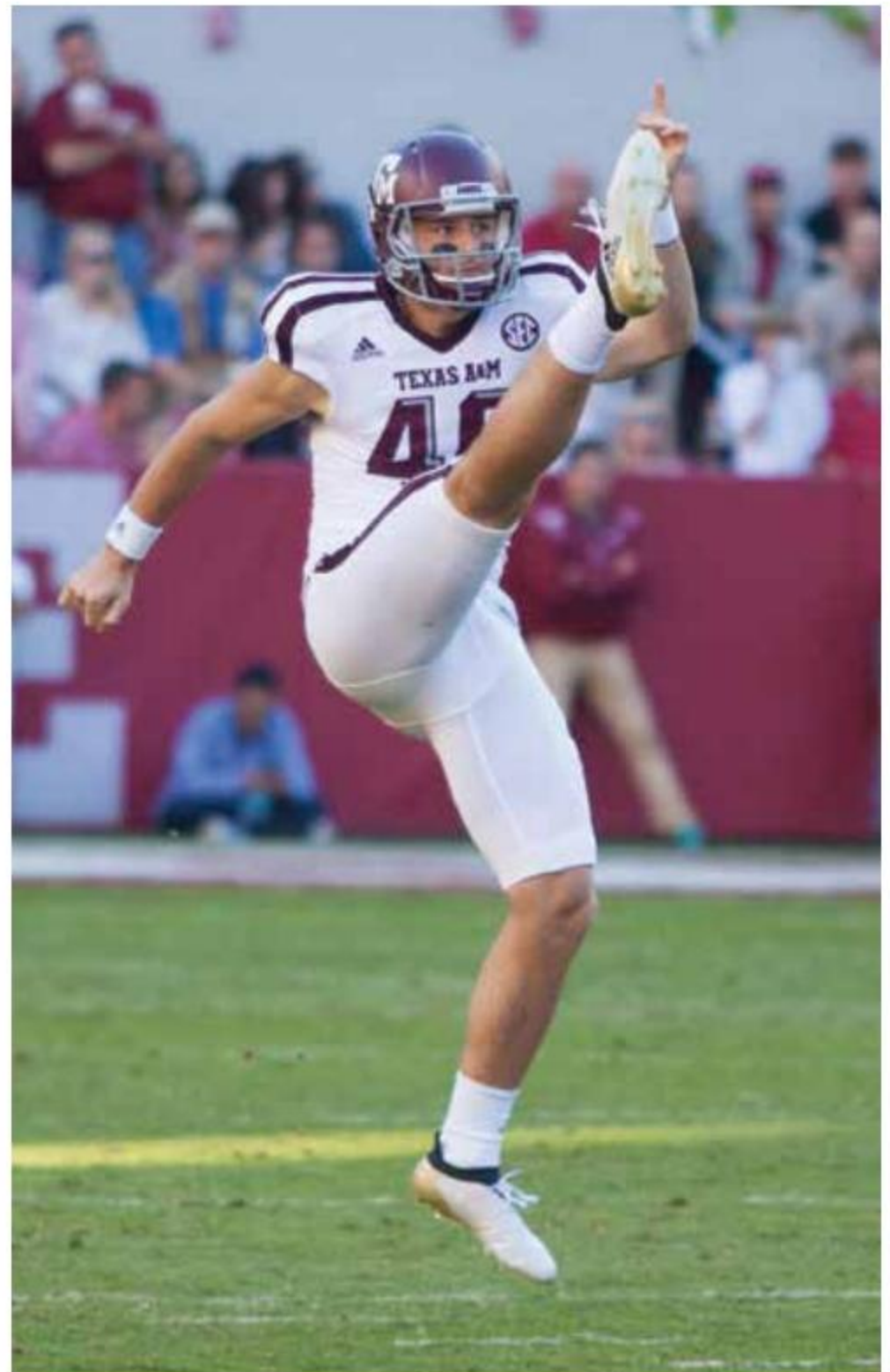
of 41.7 yards.

Shane was quick to give credit to the entire special teams unit, his position coach Jeff Banks and his personal coach that he has worked with since his sophomore year in high school, Rocky Willingham. He talked about what a mental position punter is. "It's a lot of mental reps, a lot of dry swing kicks, a lot of stretching," he said. "You got to have your mind locked in and you have to really focus on every little detail."

Tripucka comes from a big sports family. His dad Chris played at Boston College in the mid 80's. "He was there with Doug Flutie and he was there when Flutie won the Heisman" explained Shane. "A lot of family members of mine have played professional sports. My grandfather was the first quarterback for the Denver Bronco's and his #18 jersey is retired. My uncle Kelly played in the NBA for a decade.

All seven of the kids on my dad's side played Division I sports and half of them played professional sports around the globe. It's kind of nice because they have a lot of experience so they can help me out. I mean I'm just trying to live up to it a little bit."

Shane has definitely made his family proud. Battling through the grind to earn his spot on the field, he is an inspiration to others of how hard work and determination can pay off. Shane knows the legacy of punters here at A&M and has set lofty goals for himself. "I want to try and be better than them," he said. "I want to set new goals and new standards for punting here at Texas A&M." Based on what we've seen so far, it looks like he's definitely on track to accomplish those goals.







# SEASON OPENER

CHILDRESS LEADS TEAM TO FIRST VICTORY WITH  
PAINT, TOOLS, AND COMPASSION

BY ABBY HAGE







Tradition is the heart and soul of Texas A&M University. From yelling "Farmers Fight" and swaying to the War Hymn to the core values that each Aggie holds themselves to, tradition is what keeps this university alive.

For head baseball coach, Rob Childress, tradition is also the heartbeat of his team.

Since 2006 when Childress became head coach, the Aggie baseball team has gathered for the first time each season in an event known as the "Paint-A-Thon," a double header community service project and first opportunity for the team to work together for a win.

This event, which embodies the core value of selfless service, has brought the Aggie baseball team to serve 11 families in the Bryan/College Station community.

This year, 50 people gathered for the Paint-A-Thon, including members of the team, coaching staff and support staff. This event is especially unique because instead of the boys meeting each

other for the first time in practice jerseys and cleats, they meet with paint brushes, ladders and hammers.

"This is a blue collar event sets the tone for the rest of the season," Childress said. "It is a good way to let the players know we are going to work hard for anything we receive."

On August 27th, The team answered an early seven a.m. wake up call and were anxious to meet each other and do great things for their community.

"My hope is that we make a positive impact," Childress said, "not only on the field and in the classroom, but in the community. Being a servant is key to being a part of this team."

This year, the Paint-A-Thon brought the team to the home of Ms. Ocie Walker. As the men painted the exterior of her home and spruced up her landscaping, Ms. Walker was filled with gratitude. Such a small act of kindness by the Texas A&M baseball team made a major impact

in her life.

Not only is the Paint-A-Thon about giving back to the community and a Texas A&M baseball tradition, but it is about teamwork and creating a bond the team shares outside of the baseball field.

"It always blows me away what can be accomplished by 50 guys in six hours when we all know what our job is and we all have the same goal in mind," Childress said. "We've seen here what we can do when we work together as a team and do our jobs. Just think what we can do on the field if we approach it the same way."

At the end of the day, the hard work put in is worth it. The Paint-A-Thon is what Coach Childress and the team consider a grand slam and a perfect ending to their first game.





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## Aggie Women's Rugby Club

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Rucks, mauls and scrums anyone? If you're not sure what I'm talking about, don't feel bad. Such is the lingo for a rugby match. According to club president, Tyler Greenwood, most of the members who join the team have never heard of rugby before.

Greenwood herself joined the club by chance while looking for the soccer table at MSC Open House her first year at A&M. "They talked me into going to the first practice of the season, where I fell in love with the sport and never looked back," Greenwood said.

Greenwood says the team consists of women of every size, experience

level, and background; there is not one specific mold. The team competes in the South West Women's Conference along with University of Texas and Texas Tech. In the spring, the team merges with the Lone Star Conference and plays against smaller schools.

The team currently consists of twenty-five women. Rebecca Huizar and Megan Urdiales are two veteran playmakers on the squad who, along with president Tyler Greenwood, were recognized in an article by USARugby.

The team practices twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, and they also participate in two mandatory fitness sessions per week. Greenwood's favorite moment on the team came this last fall as the team practiced and competed. "This last group of women that I was able to play with was just incredible," Greenwood said. "They have definitely

made all of the blood, sweat, and tears I have put into this sport worthwhile, and I am grateful that I got to spend my last semester playing with them."

Greenwood told AI that this group of women is more like a family than a team. She loves the fact that, while everyone has their ups and downs, at the end of the day the women are always there for each other. The sport is not easy, but the passion these women have to compete and represent Texas A&M is pretty special.



## Basketball Club

BY ROB HAVENS '88

Playing competitive sports can be one of the most rewarding experiences a student can have. Some students at Texas A&M join a sport club and learn a new sport that they have never played before, while others have been participating in the activity for years and just want to continue to compete. One of the newest sport clubs at A&M is the Basketball Club.

The team is comprised of talented players, most of whom played varsity basketball in high school. This year's squad has eleven players, and they practice twice a week for two hours.

Club president, Joseph Stewart, joined the team his freshman year because he missed playing competitively. "Sure,

playing at the Rec was fun and all, but I missed all the aspects of competitive basketball," Stewart said. "From the practices, the intense and competitive games, the camaraderie of a team, and everything in between, the club gave me a great chance to do all of that, and it's certainly been a highlight of my time in college."

Last year's team won both the fall and spring leagues—an exceptional accomplishment considering how new the club is. One of the team's biggest rivals is the Rice University club. "The games between the two squads are always super competitive, close games," Stewart said.

The team also competes against the University of Texas, as well as the Corps of Cadets club team. The games with the Corps always draw a large crowd and are very exciting.

This year's team won five straight games to make the playoffs but lost in the semifinals to Lone Star College-Kingwood, the eventual league champions. "We've got some great team leaders in Derek Cahn, Jake Walton, and Kenny Johnson," Stewart said. "There's also Nick Harris, a long time Basketball

Club member and key player for us."

The club will compete in the spring at the University of Houston regional tournament, which will allow them to qualify for the national tournament.

When asked what his favorite thing about being a part of the club is, Stewart responded, "Oh, goodness, everything about traveling is a favorite. All the jokes and jabs, jamming out, pranks, and just building chemistry with each other make for a great experience. You really grow close to your teammates in times like that. I wouldn't trade it for anything."



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